

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-15
EB-08 TRSE-00 /077 W
-----191052Z 115446 /12

R 171733Z MAR 76
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1721
SECDEF
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AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: MPOL, UK, NATO
SUBJECT: UK DEFENSE EXPENDITURES - CUTBACKS

1. ON THE EVE OF THE COMMONS DEBATE ON THE UK DEFENSE
WHITE PAPER, 22-23 MARCH, THE HOUSE OF COMMONS EXOENDI-
TURE COMMITTEE PUBLISHED YESTERDAY ITS DEFENSE AND
FOREIGN AFFAIRS SUB-COMMITTEE REPORT ON "THE CUMULATIVE
EFFECTS OF CUTS IN DEFENSE EXPENDITURE." (SECOND
REPORT FROM THE EXPENDITURE COMMITTEE 1976-1977, HOUSE
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OF COMMONS PAPER 254, HM STATIONERY OFFICE.) ALL OF
THE QUALITY PAPERS GIVE THE REPORT HEAVY COVERAGE AND
THE HEADLINES CONVEY WELL THE MAJOR THRUST OF THIS RE-
PORT: "MPS SAY ARMED FORCES HAVE BEEN REDUCED TO DANGER
LEVEL" (THE TIMES); "EFFECTS BEING FELT BY FRONT-LINE
TROOPS" (THE TIMES); "BRITAIN'S WEAKENED DEFENCES ALARM

INQUIRY" (THE TELEGRAPH); "EARLY USE OF NUCLEAR ARMS MADE NECESSARY" (THE TELEGRAPH); AND "DEFENSE CUTS GOING TOO FAR, SAY MPS" (THE GUARDIAN).

2. THE DEFENSE SUB-COMMITTEE'S REPORT IS AN IMPORTANT ONE AND ITS FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS RECEIVE WIDESPREAD RECOGNITION, PARTICULARLY SINCE THE REPORT IS THE PRODUCT OF AN ALL-PARTY COMMITTEE OF MPS WHICH TAKES EXPERT TESTIMONY FROM INVITED SPECIALISTS DRAWN FROM GOVERNMENT, THE SERVICES, INDUSTRY AND ACADEMIA. NATURALLY, UK GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS INVITED TO DISCUSS ISSUES DO SO WITH OFFICIAL PERMISSION AND THE USUAL WHITEHALL CONSTRAINTS APPLY. THE GOVERNMENT'S COMMENTS ON THE REPORT WILL BE PUBLISHED IN DUE COURSE. MULLEY GAVE EVIDENCE TO THE COMMITTEE ON 1 FEBRUARY CONCERNING DEFENSE CUTS AND THE COMMITTEE STATES "WE FEEL BOUND TO REPORT TO THE HOUSE THAT WE DID NOT OBTAIN FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE THE REASSURANCES WHICH WE HAD SOUGHT . . ."

3. THE SUB-COMMITTEE IS HEADED BY COL. SIR HARWOOD HARRISON (C), AND ITS PRESENT MEMBERS ARE: SIR FREDERIC BENNETT (C); JAMES BOYDEN (LA); ANTHONY KERSHAW (C); M. MILLER (LA); J.F.H.ROPER (LA/COOP); AND NEVILLE SANDLESON (LA).

4. THE REPORT STRESSES THAT THE CUMULATIVE EFFECT OF DEFENSE CUTS HAS BEEN AND IS LIKELY TO BE INCREASINGLY FELT BY THE FRONT-LINE TROOPS. THE REPORT NOTES THAT THE "... POINT HAS NOW BEEN REACHED WHERE OUR FORCES UNCLASSIFIED

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ARE BEING SERIOUSLY DEPRIVED OF MODERN EQUIPMENT NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN, WITH OTHER MEMBERS OF THE ALLIANCE, SUFFICIENT CONVENTIONAL CAPABILITY TO DETER THE WARSAW PACT FROM ACTS OF AGGRESSION . . ."

5. THE COMMITTEE ALSO ASKS WHETHER IT IS GOVERNMENT POLICY TO REGARD DEFENSE SPENDING IN JUST THE SAME WAY AS SPENDING BY OTHER DEPARTMENTS, REGARDLESS OF THE EFFECT ON THE FORCES' OPERATIONAL CAPABILITY OR "... WHETHER THE DEFENSE BUDGET OUGHT TO BE ASSESSED IN THE LIGHT OF THE PERCEIVED THREAT TO NATIONAL AND NATO SECURITY."

6. THE REPORT CATALOGUES THE LONG LIST OF PROGRAM/PROJECT CANCELLATIONS, ET CETERA, BROUGHT ABOUT BY DEFENSE CUTS SINCE 1973.

7. EMBASSY WILL POUCH COPIES TO DEPARTMENT AND DOD/ISA.

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*** Current Handling Restrictions *** n/a

*** Current Classification *** UNCLASSIFIED

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MILITARY BUDGET, MILITARY EXPENDITURES, MILITARY PLANS, NATIONAL SECURITY, PUBLIC DISCLOSURE, REPORTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 17-Mar-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977LONDON04567
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: n/a
Errors: n/a
Expiration:
Film Number: D770094-1011
Format: TEL
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t197703108/aaaaftry.tel
Line Count: 122
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON MICROFILM, TEXT ON-LINE
Message ID: a41728ad-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15-Oct-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2957212
Secure: OPEN
Status: <DBA CORRECTED> srp 970828
Subject: UK DEFENSE EXPENDITURES - CUTBACKS
TAGS: MPOL, UK, NATO
To: DOD STATE MULTIPLE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/a41728ad-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009